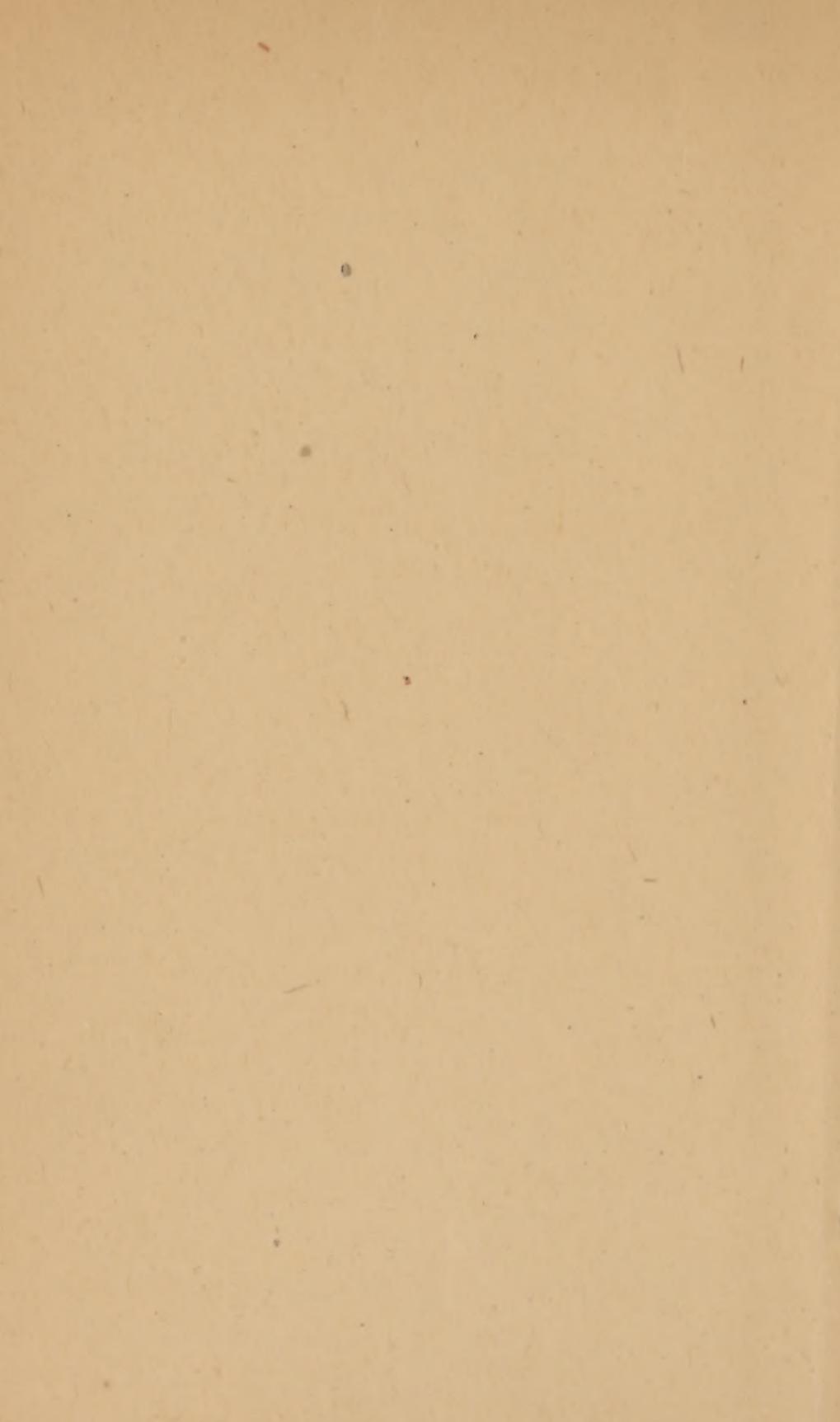


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SOME OBSCURE MENTAL SYMPTOMS OF DISEASE.

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SUCH a considerable number of cases of disease seriously interfering with some of the functions of the mind without causing marked intellectual disorder have come lately within my observation, that I have thought it worth while to call the attention of the Society to their more important features.

A child seven years old, with the history of profound cerebral disturbance at the age of five, and right hemiplegia of short duration, was observed to have an entire change of character since that serious injury to the brain. Previous to it he had been in no way different from what might have been expected of a child of his age and circumstances. After it, the balance of the mind was found to be entirely destroyed, although the memory and perceptive faculties were observed to have become extraordinarily acute. Upon entering the room, it was impossible to arrest his attention sufficiently to get answers to questions for which he had abundant intelligence, except for a moment at a time; his eyes glanced rapidly about, and in five minutes he had taken in nearly every thing to be seen, beside prying into drawers and pockets so vigorously as to keep his mother on the alert to prevent him from injuring himself or some object in the room. His mother stated that the affectionate nature which he had before his brain disease had remained, but that, with it all, there was in him the real spirit of a

devil, which could not be corrected or chastised or drawn by loving care into anything better. He was the torment of every one who attempted to teach him, and yet he managed, by the aid of his unaided faculties, to pick up knowledge of a certain kind much faster than his companions. He not only did not possess the power of controlling his mental operations and his actions natural to a boy of his years, but he could not be, and never can be, educated into them. He is and always will remain, like a locomotive with the brakes off and steam up, off the track, as long as he lives, in spite of the best efforts of his friends and himself to the contrary. Steady application, reasonable self-control, reflection and judgment he will never have except to a limited degree, while the acuteness of his other faculties will keep him in constant danger up to the time when he follows the natural law of the unfortunates like him, to die of disease or accident, perhaps hastened by his own temerity, to commit suicide, to develop into more general mental disease, or to be convicted of crime justly or wrongly.

The second case was similar to the first except in its origin, which was congenital, the child having been born almost literally in the midst of a drunken brawl of a mother who had rarely been sober during the whole period of gestation. Its future will be similar to the other's.

It is by no means uncommon to see less marked types of this form of brain-disease in women after confinement, in young persons of families with neurotic tendencies, after typhoid fever and scarlet fever, and in old people as the result of cerebral haemorrhage, but of so marked a degree as in the two cases which I have quoted, or sufficient to constitute a genuine type of insanity, it is so rare that even many men having had long experience in insane asylums state that they have never seen it.

The next case is one, the notes of which were given me

by Dr. S. K. Towle, whose words I cannot do better than quote, of a man whom he had under his care at the Soldiers' Home near Milwaukee, Wis., some eleven or twelve years ago.

"He had been a lieutenant in a volunteer regiment, and I gave him rather more privileges on that account, but after a time I found that he was more nearly an example of 'total depravity' than I had ever seen. There was no truth in him, and he was intelligent enough to make his lies often seem plausible to me as well as to others. By his writing and talking and conduct generally, he kept the patients and their friends in a ferment, and gave me more trouble than the whole hospital beside. For a long time I could find no evidence of any disease about him; but after long observation I thought that I got evidence of epileptic seizures in his sleep, and possibly lighter ones, *petit mal*, in the day time; and I settled down on that. As to insanity, I am sure he would have impressed a casual observer as an unusually bright and intelligent fellow, while at the same time perhaps he would be maliciously lying in every sentence.

"He had a small scar about the middle of his forehead, which he said was due to a slight flesh wound from a glancing ball in battle, and I finally thought that possibly his epilepsy might be caused from the effects of the blow from the bullet. While he was under my care an older brother came to see him, and he told me that up to the time his brother, my patient, who so tried my patience, entered the army, he was almost a model young man, amiable and affectionate, the pet of the whole family and intimate friends; 'but,' said he, 'ever since he came back he has been possessed of a devil if ever any one was.'

"After a time, much to my delight, he asked for a transfer to the Soldiers' Home at Dayton, Ohio, which I got for him with commendable alacrity, and he went there. His con-

duct at Dayton was the same as with me, but after a few months he quite suddenly died, when an autopsy was made. In sawing open the skull, at the point of the small scar on his forehead, the saw came directly upon the butt end of a conical bullet, two-thirds of which projected through the skull, piercing the membranes and into the brain. The internal table of the skull had been considerably splintered by the ball, the pieces not being entirely separated, and there was evidence of severe chronic inflammation all around, and quite a collection of pus in the brain where the ball projected into it. Here was the 'devil' that had possessed the poor fellow. Instead of being an outrageously wicked, unprincipled man, he was a martyr to the Union cause as much as Abraham Lincoln, and more, for the ball that killed my patient not only took his life but destroyed his character, lost him the love and esteem of his friends, and doomed him for half a dozen years to do the things he would most have hated and despised when he was himself. Dr. Dunlap, the assistant surgeon at Dayton, told me that he found in this man's trunk letters from several, half a dozen I think at least, women in various places, from which it appeared that he was engaged to be married to each one of them. The letters were neatly tied up in packages, each one's separately, in several instances with photographs supposed to be of the writers, and the date of reception and reply was noted on many of the letters in a business-like way."

The fourth case is of a gentleman, who without other marked mental symptoms except an unusually advanced mental deterioration for his age, 64, and yet without senile dementia, had so strong an impulse to kill two members of his household, a son whom he loved, and a mother-in-law who annoyed him in many ways, that he begged to be sent to an asylum for the safety which his family persistently refused to think necessary. In the course of six

months, with the progressive weakening of his mental faculties, his power of self-control became so much diminished that during one of his paroxysms of homicidal impulse, excited perhaps in part by irritation from a natural cause, he killed his mother-in-law, an act entirely abhorrent to his nature. He afterwards begged to be never left alone with his son for fear that he might commit some act of violence upon him. There was no delusion, no illusion, no hallucination, no mania, no melancholia, no delirium, no unconsciousness, no ignorance of the nature of his deed, no blunting of his sense of right and wrong, not the slightest moral perversion, no feeling but horror at his doing such a thing, and yet the insane impulse, as inevitable as the sword of Damocles or the dagger of Macbeth, was so strong that he could not resist it. He was *conscias sui*, but not *compos sui*. After his arrest his feeling of grief and remorse was so great, the disgrace of being hanged, which he feared, was so terrible, and his mental suffering was so indescribably intense, that he tied a handkerchief around his neck, meaning to hang himself, an entirely sane and logical process; but, in spite of his insanity, his fine character asserted itself, his ordinary self-control returned, and he said, "No, if I am to perish for my act, it shall be at the hands of the law, it must not be by my own hand; that is not right." It is not possible to find a more irresponsible act than this man's homicide, and it is not easy to conceive of more tremendous self-control as regards his own self-destruction, or more sane appreciation of his own condition and relations to society.

The cases which I have described, including that one which was complicated with senile dementia, come under the head of moral insanity, not very properly so called, because the loss of control over the operations of the mind constitutes evidence of impaired intellect and is a purely mental symptom, which under some form or other is al-

ways discoverable. There is in many cases frequent or persistent headache; in most, there are great irritability, some feature of intensely developed egoism, general or partial moral perversion, exaggerated or perverted sexual instinct, decided loss of the sense of the relation of the individual to the community, a striking misconception of the adjustment of means to ends, overwhelming strength of ideas and impulses as compared with power of self-control, and yet a certain fixed standard of right and wrong, together with a definite sense of duty and a power of self-control at certain times and in certain directions, which with the quickness of the perceptive faculties and memory, usually convey to those not familiar with the disease an idea of simple depravity. It differs from the eccentricity of character over which more and more control is gained with advancing age. Its diagnostic point, if there is one such, consists in the fact that like other diseases it is progressive, and that it ends as a rule in suicide, or advances slowly into mania or dementia with such gradual progress that there is no time at which a marked change in character or condition is discernible. Until mania or dementia appear, crimes are rarely committed; and the point at which accountability ends and irresponsibility begins is the most difficult problem in the whole range of the medical jurisprudence of insanity. In reported cases of recovery, I should doubt the diagnosis.

I have illustrated very briefly a type of insanity which is recognized, under one name or another, by the leading authorities in mental disease, although not fully described except in the German medical literature. It is easy, as Krafft-Ebing says, for the non-expert expert to fail of a correct appreciation of such a case. This seems to me the most terrible of all of the many forms of mental disease, as it is also the least understood and the most difficult to differentiate from depravity. The very sharpening of some of the faculties of the mind, coincident with defect, degeneration

or disease manifested in others, is generally accepted as evidence of responsibility, although it is only an illustration of that marvellous compensation in nature for failure in one direction by concentration of force in another, by virtue of which the blind deaf-mute learns to see with her fingers and to hear with her sense of smell.

Important as is the medico-legal study of this form of disease, it is not my intention to say more in that direction at present. The point to which I desire to call the attention of our Society to-day is that these same symptoms may exist, and do very often exist, although in far less degree, as the early, and often as the only, indications of the greater number of those many diseases which we group together under the name of insanity; that they may accompany chronic disease of the nervous system; that they frequently indicate acute, curable disease, and also that in children, especially, they are often overlooked and neglected because their import is not fully appreciated. By far the majority of mental diseases, taken at the time when they are recognized and placed under treatment, are absolutely incurable. For months and often for years before that time, however, there have usually been unmistakable, or at least suspicious, evidences of brain-disorder, consisting simply in slight change of character, so slight that in a case which has recently come to my attention, a young woman in the early stage of mania was advised to marry, and with sad results. I should say that it is exceptional for general paralysis of the insane and for insanity of persecution, for instance, to be diagnosticated for months after its presence is apparent; and not seldom the individual has recognized for a long time the fact that he has not been fully himself. The intellect remains tolerably clear, the capacity for affairs is nearly, if not quite, as good as ever, the memory is unchanged, the mind is often even more active than usual, at least not commonly of

diminished power, and yet the person is not himself. He becomes more readily excited, very easily irritated, neglectful of his home duties, suspicious and distrustful of his best friends, inattentive to the accustomed courtesies and refinements of life, disagreeable to his family, less truthful and scrupulous, at times slightly depressed. Less often there is simply a condition of mental and physical torpor and lowered moral standard.

These symptoms, especially if without external cause, following child-birth, fevers, brain disease, physiological changes, or any illness depressing the system, indicate a condition which needs treatment as much as a fractured leg or an inflamed joint.

The question naturally arises, "What can be expected by treatment even at this early stage of a disease in which less than one-fifth of the cases are permanently cured?" I can only answer that if we follow the advice of Sydenham, that scarlet fever is dangerous only from the interference of the physician, many of our children who might have been cured of an acute nephritis will die of Bright's disease. If we fail to examine most carefully into the causes of every slight cough, many an innocent catarrhal pneumonia will end in fatal pulmonary consumption, and an insidious pleuritic effusion will now and then kill our patient almost before we know what is the matter with him. I cannot help thinking that an earlier detection of insanity will result in its wiser treatment and in a greatly increased proportion of cures.

I should not be justified in occupying your time now in a consideration of the proper management of the obscure mental symptoms which I have described, and which for want of a better name are often called nervous, farther than to say that I believe the matter to be one which will repay careful study, and which cannot be properly dismissed, as is the popular idea at present, in the case of women at least, by putting people to bed and fattening them. I shall never

forget an intelligent lady's remark, that while her husband was rich, she had so-called nervous prostration. After he had lost his health and his property and she had something to do, she got well.

I have lately seen several cases of chorea in which the characteristic muscular twitchings were nearly or quite absent, or only observed after some physical exhaustion or upon attempts to perform coördinated movements. The usual mental symptoms existed, commonly with severe headache, and disappeared in about the usual time, if treated with rest of the brain, general hygiene, and arsenic, but persisted, if neglected or not properly attended to. I believe such mental indications of disease, independently of chorea and insanity, to be more common than has been supposed, that their judicious treatment is quite necessary to the future welfare of the race, and that their prevention demands our most thoughtful and earnest attention. I have even thought that with our present idea of education the whole available vital energy of girls at least is often exhausted in physical inactivity and intellectual development at the expense of what, in our ignorance of its exact nature, we call nervous force. For this our school system is largely responsible, and will continue to be so, until the intense strain upon mind and body is let up, and physical training and moral force receive that attention which their importance demands.

Mr. Charles Roberts, of London, than whom no one is more competent to express an opinion upon that point, has recently said, in a letter to Mr. Edwin Chadwick, "I think children are being very cruelly used by the Legislature. It took nearly fifty years, and half as many Acts of Parliament, to emancipate them from the injurious effects of excessive physical labor; but the result has been merely to transfer them from one taskmaster to another—from the manufacturer and their own parents to the schoolmaster;

and to subject them to mental strain and physical inactivity, more injurious to their future well-being than their former condition. I look on your proposal to introduce the half-time system into schools, as a sort of mental 'Factory Act' of the utmost importance and urgency, and the establishment in elementary schools of systematic physical education, as absolutely necessary to prevent great physical degeneracy in future." We may not agree literally with Mr. Roberts, but must all acknowledge that there is much force in what he says. Each human being has a certain amount of force which can be safely expended every twenty-four hours, and which can be kept fresh only by sufficient rest, food and physical exercise. The idle as well as the busy may exhaust, and more than exhaust, their daily supply, and with only one result.

